

INTENSITY
AND
MEANINGLESSNESS

By Voice of Failure

T. J.
1881.

Intensity Explains It All

What would happen if we analyzed the contours of experience and “politics” through a lens of intensity? A singular lens that purposefully leaves all other metrics behind as primary characters. Instead, the likes of love, boredom, viciousness, torment, joy, suffering...all are only validated by the degree of their intensity. Such a project would necessitate some arbitrary marker whereby we might understand a scale of intensity or a marker of its lack. This marker would have to be the Mark of Banality.

One cannot really make a convincing argument for why something would be with or without intensity – though, paradoxically, intensity-as-experienced is nearly impossible to argue with (maybe if you keep your Apple headset on this truth of millions of years will fade away, proving that all truth was constructed, even the most primordial). Is it the crowd, in Elias Canetti’s sense, that comes closest to being an objective display of intensity? Or perhaps we should envision that it is an intensity “liberated” from the reign of banality (we are often more open to the universalism of liberation than an admitted arbitrary scale). For large gatherings of compelled people who display in their rioting or protest what Foucault might call the “great general necessity” there is a realization of Canetti’s fundamental belief that “It is only in a crowd that man can become free of his fear of being touched.” But this liberatory moment “when all who belong to the crowd get rid of their differences and feel equal” is ironically bound to the marker of banality.

If intensity is the first victim in a generalized civilizing process, then we could posit that the mark of banality is something like an original sin but one of diffused order. Not a matter of discreet laws but a generalized smothering or replacement of intensity, not entirely linear but driven towards a goal of boredom, of that most hideous control where all things come with their name and measurement, where all ideas are already mapped, where the flustering storms of nodal control resolve all intensity by a pacifist violence. F. Perlman writes of an invasion of silence, and he hints at the same thing, but it is not

quite a silencing as it is a feverous desiccation. It is not a singular dynamic or consciousness – there are counter examples to every purification of reality! And neither is intensity a “plane” intermingling with all, it defines instead the experience of all. It is more fundamental than the petty sad passions of economists and human rights lawyers. It cannot be captured, only surrendered or replaced. Banality must always wear a veil because beneath it always is a growing emptiness or a receding plane. The discourse on authenticity often falls apart because it looks to discreet things, Aristotle’s potentiality and telos mean nothing, they are compensatory. MacIntyre’s moral simulacrum can never account for its own emotivism because the only evidence that can be provided in *After Virtue*, for this analysis, is the utter lack of intensity. Right/left politics practice their simulations of intensity on each other and render them meaningless by measure of their impotence – the true amazing feat is the ability to banalize violence and pain and murder, to make boring even the most absurd gestures.

Perhaps instead of creating an arbitrary marker of banality we should consider, because maybe this will taste better, that banality defines for us an anti-essential. In the attempted destruction of, harnessing of, perversion of intensity we encounter the true anti-nature which is manifest through nature. We can envision that banality is the true enemy, that things, experience, words, speech, life and death are all brought to heel by this plague of the terminally boring (the most agonizing death is the one we are forced to live through). Philippe Aries calls the death embraced and lived with a “tamed death” but he confuses the reader because what he implies is an embracing of intensity, not its refusal; “the fact remains that for more than a thousand years people had been perfectly adapted to this promiscuity between the living and the dead.” Now the dead are buried under the absolute certainty of their death, the banalization of their existence by raw fact of their biological end.

Instead of outside structures or determinant institutions being the lines which allow for an expression against them (freedom), it would be the generalized diminution in the range of intensity which actually corresponds to our sense of freedom – which, in any case, only becomes a source of “desire” once its lack is felt. That is to say that it is far less about institutions, indeed they are only bulwarks against the potential (not inevitable it would seem) of intensity. Intensity is deployed as invigoration or seduction – the crowd in all its iterations being the tool by which communities are drawn out and assimilated, where intensity is offered in its maximalist and singular direction towards a self-policing discipline.

We might here argue that the reversal of intensity, its gift/counter-gift arrangement, is with that of banality. But the contours of intensity are nowhere and it is not an exchangeable phenomenon since intensity can imbue even silence and stillness. The crowd thus represents, rather than a pure form of intensity, its first simulation, which must be birthed by banality itself. Simulation implies a subterranean banality. If all is fundamentally illusory we are still left with the paradox of emotive experience and the haunting of intensity, whose metric can't be quantized and which does not inhabit any singular "biomechanical maker."

It is only under the droll destruction of vibrant silence and the intensity of simplicity that we can obtain the symbolic intensity of the crowd whereby "it's constant fear of disintegration means that it will accept any goal." (Cannetti) We fear that we will leave the crowd (in any mutation) and be left (particularly in this time of dead recycled values) utterly alone. The crowd is not only a function of population, it is more fundamentally a function of labor – that great key to the banal, where things begin their normalization. Did those collecting surface crude oil for lamps imagine this magic would transform itself into the instantly banal procession of energy consuming devices (is there even an Accursed Share in this case?) It is less that the crowd animates our carnal desires than it provides a simulacrum of a universal intensity. The continuous depression which results from the crowd's repeated failures cannot lay at the crowd's feet.

Cohn and John Gray and all the realist philosophers mistake the fierce and murderous crowd as a revolutionary organization, they mistake millenarian belief as instigator. These are only pathetic ephemera to the much deeper and fundamental issue of banalized life. The slaughter and torment in medieval religious movements can be attributed, in its directness and ferociousness (which we can only simulate today, see ISIS) with the glimmer of intensity that still sparkled through some field of emotive detection and whose gruesomeness was not only in its brutality but in its utter impotency to establish anything. This led then to a much greater reaction against the banality that stormed across the land. The trite and painful repetition of a consolidated church, the standardization of economy, all the great forces of boredom and stupidity (banalization is something like the fornication of these two) provoked an intensity that would eventually be harnessed by the revolutionary movements. The fact that the great horrors of technological life in terms of death were essentially banal operations of "necessity" and political maneu-

vering is only evidence that even where intensity would seem impossible to purge, banality has won out. Arendt's analysis of Eichmann and his trial being only the most gross and repugnant indictment of this plague of banality.

And what destroys intensity more than science? We see glimmers of the destruction in the similitude of medieval studies but who could image that all fundamental forces, all concepts of consciousness, all internal understandings of self would be brought under the moronic microscope of scientific inquiry until all that was left is the momentary intensity of suicide? (Deleuze) The fascination with accuracy and correctness has led us to discount anything more fundamental. If there is a truly Evil order (outside our banishment of banal evil, see Baudrillard), an order which circumvents the pure-being of God, it is that of the objectification of the world. Not simply because it harms creation or anything of the sort. These are bad metrics. The concern for us should rather be something like intensity – though pick your own, I hardly wish to banalize intensity by offering it up to the jackals of science or technology. The paradox of its experience and the distance of its definition creates its validity.

Jean Baudrillard scandalized the world of human rights and good intentions when he claimed: "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place". And even worse he double downed on his claim after the "experts" of war offered evidence of conflict. But then again, they did not understand Jean to begin with. But if we pivot from media studies or the metaphysical reign of "reality" we can better understand the lack of the war by framing it through intensity. Better yet, the entire media world can be understood as a simulation not only of intensity but of the initial simulacra of intensity, the crowd etc. Rather than intensity slipping away as physical and metaphysical distance increases to each new conflict (is not Ukraine the absolute epitome of this trend?) it is the active recruitment and destruction of intensity by banality that is taking place. Not a seething apathy that happens from a kind of lack of heightened consciousness, these are the excuses of the banalized experts – the boring morons who contemplate everything from the standpoint of misplace minutiae instead of obvious fundamentals. These are the people that will claim intensity esoteric but think "mutually assured destruction" a logic and rational tool with no call to God and embodying no symbol whatsoever!

What pathetic fools! It is indeed, and we might as well stop and not make it parenthetical, these fools who even banalize imbecility. For was it not once the case that the profoundly stupid were allowed their own freedom of intensity? That has been medicalized away and now those of profoundly diminished capacity (as relative to human experience over at least 200,000 years) can be groomed by the magic of commodity and its remarkable accessibility (which banalizes wealth and poverty – the death of the aristocracy and the birth of the unbearable well-meaning philanthropic social reformer elite) leaving no stupidity left unturned. Let them be for God's sake. For what purpose do we recruit these idiots? To the point of their ultimate dead end: cable news commentary? You may find this a hyperbolic suggestion, but it is completely self-evident that the moronic have the most successful affirmative action campaign. Regularly you will hear on television not only gross and repugnant propaganda (the ultimate banalization of politics) but the serious tone of a fully convinced idiot who proclaims opinions that spin backwards from logic. The inverse of a fatal logic, a logic fulfilling an opposite destiny where it must flay itself in the town square and scream at the top of its dying lungs: "I am unified!"

Banality is not an origin story of our civilization, it is a rather a bit more like what was let in when a door was opened. It is a nasty potential or destiny (no one can tell the difference). It does not explain what happens, it instead colors all analysis and resistance and renders them the same.

The Terror of Meaninglessness

We now sit under only one terror and it is the absolute inability to find meaning in the supposedly objectively increasing sources of misery. From war to terror we are wrapped in a triumphant statistics that proclaims the worst casualties per capita of all time for every event. A veritable competition which has lost the referent of victor.

Now we are haunted by an utter lack of ghosts. Each day the casualties of our contemporary battles enlarge objectively, the reality of each event is reaffirmed. Fact checking is only possible in a world devoid of fact, a world where the fact has dissolved. Confirmation and coherence thus become a fetishized form of commodity, being as they are separated forever from their absolute basis (which was only ever an illusion anyway, but it did afford certain advantages, such as the prospect of rebellion against the true power). Now that power is everywhere we are caught on the wrong side of nothing in an absolute sense. We exist under the veil of a critical illusion which, as it dissolved, left with a spell that we should all observe forever its emptiness and attempt forever a resurrection of that which never was.

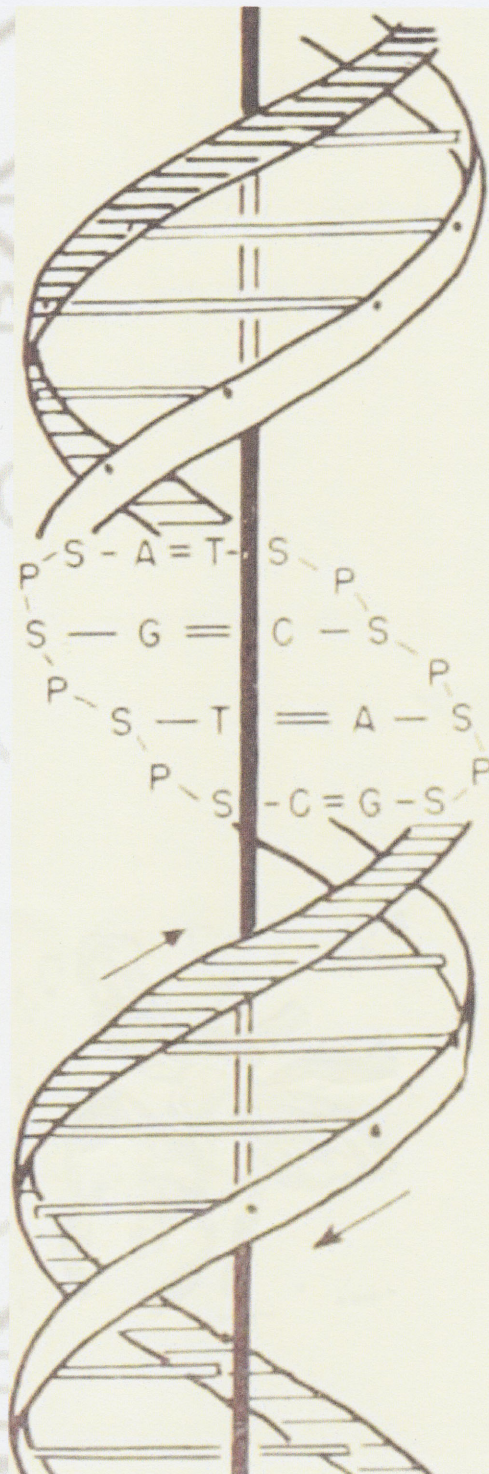
Whereas before power maintained a complex regalia and symbolic function it now is nothing but the materials of its reality – its utter functional proof in technology is the only source of power, it is now immediate and present in every hand and can suspend over the “social” the absolute power of its non-existence and rely completely on the seduction of its immanence. What else could a subject desire or be seduced by? What else but the absolute equality (which capitalism and communism both lauded so well, arguing merely the origins and equity of egalitarianism itself) of all subjects, not by removal of power but by complete and total ingestion. We have been seduced by a sacrifice (and illusion) like Juliet’s to Romeo. In turn we are caught also in the same trap and the demand for our signs of ultimate commitment. And

we have proved it, the sacrifice of all sources and referents has been accomplished. Those who thought this incrementalism that consumed all traditions would resolve in a disintegration were naïve political fools, the new materialists who bargained on bad marginal readings of "postmodernists" by pivoting to identity, yet always assured themselves on "material reality."

And so now it is that we sit under a new terror, not a terror aimed at the simulation but against the utter banality of technological function which can never be denied, only blasphemed against. That is to say, we sit under the terror of meaninglessness. Which is why the numbers of dead in Europe and the Middle East must always, in a ponderous and incongruent way to the previous symbolic arraignments of statistics, increase or be the worst to have ever come. It must always prove itself by utter immanence of fact, of the banal authority-of-fact that Lasch understood. But what becomes of fact without truth? A constant disturbance, a permanent disquiet which can only be resolved by speed, it must always eclipse itself to prove itself. Without this proof (and it is not a matter of thin or thick proofs or types of evidence, not even in the slightest is it related to these anachronistic referents) there is nothing at all, only a vacuum pulling towards mass suicide. It is in the most hardened proponents of this immanent fact and its authority that we find the utter void which acts as a motor toward action even more than force. Observe the proliferation of the commentator.

Jacques Ellul understood that all this talk of propaganda was rather pointless without an action, not a specific action, but action within a frame or form which could be inculcated. It was not for him propaganda as tool but as inevitability, it must exist by nature of technological society and it must always drive towards action – banality or intensity was not important, but action itself. It has always been engagement and participation which defined the odd grasp of power but never before has it been so vulgar. To ask each subject to collectively, through an amalgam of reasons (the more the better), advocate for nothing but a massive deterrence -- a massive redirection from anything interesting at all. It hardly matters what you believe, as long as you believe something and tell it to everyone else. Just as it was not sex which was repressed but sex which was repression, it is not opinion and radicality which is repressed – it is opinion and radicality which performs repression. In each breath we obviate any symbolic countergift by needing -- on a level so far removed from materialism it becomes a joke -- the immanence of fact reconfirmed. Again, it is not at all about terror as experienced, understood,

grappled with, contemplated – these are not our modes and any simulation of those themes is churned now into a further order of simulation called ChatGPT (which, if it became “conscious” would be caught, ironically, in a simulacrum which, despite its god-like status, it had no choice in). The rise of AI art and poetry is the death of them in any popular form. There will be no more of either unless the witticism and ambivalence of poetry and theory is also captured in an ironic call to the distributive materials themselves. And it is because the entire discourse cannot tolerate an ambivalent fact (it again is not about correctitude in the slightest) that whatever theory is distributed cannot deal with the immanent fact. Our “world” is not at all concerned with the discourse of fact, only its constant mutation, miniaturization and ultimate illumination. The fact cannot become authority by being open to discourse! It is no longer a Foucauldian grid that holds power but a ceaseless iteration of facts and thought-widgets which have almost nothing to do with power other than to satisfy the maintenance requirements of the mausoleum which holds its corpse – distributed to each one of us in a digital device which performs a transubstantiation of power divorced from ritual but delivered to the demands of the coherence of banal meaningless authority. Through each device we all become witting or unwitting realists, we all bow to the inevitability of fact’s procession and our greatest fear is that in the meaningless we sense underneath objectively-defined slaughter is a cliff which cannot even deliver us to a state of nature – since nature itself has been subjected to disintegration into a series of legible immanent illuminations.



**DNA
Double
Helix:**
the
smallest
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